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JOURNALISTS' GROUP OPPOSES CIA BILL

FEDS: HEARING SCHEDULED FOR 9 A.M. EST; PRE-NOON LEAD EXPECTED.

BY BARTON REPPERT

ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

WASHINGTON (AP) - THE FREEDOMS OF SPEECH AND PRESS COULD BE SERIOUSLY RESTRICTED BY PROVISIONS OF A CIA-BACKED BILL TO OUTLAW PUBLIC IDENTIFICATION OF UNDERCOVER U.S. INTELLIGENCE AGENTS, SAYS A MAJOR JOURNALISTS' ORGANIZATION.

"EVEN WHEN NOT ABUSED, THE VERY EXISTENCE OF SUCH A LAW WILL STIFLE FREE EXPRESSION BY CONSCIENTIOUS JOURNALISTS FEARFUL OF POSSIBLE PROSECUTION AND CONVICTION," SAID ROBERT LEWIS, SPOKESMAN FOR THE SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS, SIGMA DELTA CHI.

IN TESTIMONY PREPARED FOR DELIVERY TODAY BEFORE A HOUSE INTELLIGENCE SUBCOMMITTEE, LEWIS ASSERTED THAT CERTAIN ELEMENTS OF THE PROPOSED LEGISLATION WOULD "VIOLATE EVEN THE MOST NARROW CONSTRUCTION OF THE FIRST AMENDMENT," WHICH, AMONG OTHER THINGS, GUARANTEES FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND FREEDOM OF THE PRESS.

CRITICISM BY THE JOURNALISTS' GROUP FOCUSED ON PROVISIONS UNDER WHICH THE GOVERNMENT COULD PROSECUTE INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE HAD NO ACCESS TO OFFICIAL SECRETS BUT WHO STILL MANAGE TO PINPOINT INTELLIGENCE AGENTS BY USING OPENLY PUBLISHED INFORMATION.

SUCH DEFENDANTS COULD FACE UP TO THREE YEARS IN PRISON AND A \$15,000 FINE IF THE PROSECUTION COULD SHOW THAT THEY EXPOSED AGENTS' IDENTITIES WITH INTENT TO "IMPAIR OR IMPEDE THE FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED STATES."

THE BILL ALSO WOULD PROVIDE CONSIDERABLY STIFFER PENALTIES TO PUNISH DISCLOSURES BY CURRENT OR FORMER INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS WHO HAVE HAD DIRECT ACCESS TO CLASSIFIED INFORMATION.